

## *When They See Us* Haunts Prosecutor Linda Fairstein

The prosecutor turned author has faced scrutiny before, thanks to her role in convicting the exonerated Central Park Five—but Ava DuVernay's limited series about the teenagers has created a watershed moment, as Fairstein resigns from multiple boards amid calls for a boycott of her novels.

BY LAURA BRADLEY

JUNE 5, 2019



BY PETER KRAMER/NBC/NBC NEWSWIRE VIA GETTY IMAGES.

**A**va DuVernay's most recent Netflix project, *When They See Us*, is already proving to be some of her most impactful work yet—at least, in terms of tangibly forcing change. The four-part limited series tells the story of the Central Park Five, a group of black and Latino teenagers who were wrongfully convicted in 1990 for beating and raping a jogger in Central Park. **Linda Fairstein**, the chief Manhattan sex-crimes prosecutor who was not the lead prosecutor but oversaw the case, has faced scrutiny before for the role she played in the boys' conviction. But *When They See Us* might have actually created a watershed moment: days after its release, Fairstein has resigned from multiple boards as calls for a boycott of her work erupt online.

So far Fairstein has **resigned** from at least two nonprofits: the Vassar College Board of Trustees, following an **online petition** from students and a **formal review** by the college, and Safe Horizon, a New York City–based organization that seeks to help victims of domestic abuse. According to Vassar president **Elizabeth Bradley**, Fairstein resigned because she “believed that her continuing as a Board member would be harmful to Vassar.”

Speaking with the *Daily Beast*, DuVernay said she reached out to several people involved in the case while developing *When They See Us*. “I informed them that I was making the film, that they would be included, and invited them to sit with me and talk with me so that they could share their point of view and their side of things so that I could have that information as I wrote the script with my co-writers,” DuVernay said. “Linda Fairstein actually tried to negotiate. I don’t know if I’ve told anyone this, but she tried to negotiate conditions for her to speak with me, including approvals over the script and some other things. So you know what my answer was to that, and we didn’t talk.”

**Felicity Huffman** plays Fairstein in DuVernay’s series, which dramatizes both the group’s conviction and what happened after their convictions were overturned. In the series, as in real life, the *Washington Post* notes, Fairstein remains steadfast that the investigation and prosecution was upright, and that the confessions of the wrongfully accused were not coerced.

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Jul 6, 2017 11:05am PT

## Ava DuVernay Bringing Central Park Five Limited Series to Netflix

By [Elizabeth Wagmeister](#)

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Courtesy of Netflix

[Ava DuVernay](#) is continuing her relationship with [Netflix](#), bringing a limited series about the [Central Park Five](#) case to the streaming giant, *Variety* has learned.

Netflix has greenlit the five-part scripted series for a 2019 debut. DuVernay created the project and will write and direct all five installments.

Participant Media, Tribeca Productions and Harpo Films are behind the limited series with Oprah Winfrey, Jeff Skoll, Jonathan King, Jane Rosenthal and Berry Welsh serving as

executive producers alongside DuVernay. The project is the latest collaboration for Winfrey and DuVernay who worked together on the Oscar-winning “Selma” and OWN’s “Queen Sugar.” For DuVernay, the project marks a return to Netflix for the filmmaker who wrote and directed the platform’s 2016 documentary “13th.”

“I had an extraordinary experience working with Netflix on ‘13th’ and am overjoyed to continue this exploration of the criminal justice system as a narrative project with Cindy Holland and the team there,” said DuVernay. “The story of the men known as Central Park Five has riveted me for more than two decades. In their journey, we witness five innocent young men of color who were met with injustice at every turn — from coerced confessions to unjust incarceration to public calls for their execution by the man who would go on to be the President of the United States.”

Based on the true story of the notorious Central Park Five case, each part of the limited series will focus on one of the five teenagers from Harlem — Antron McCray, Kevin Richardson, Yusef Salaam, Raymond Santana and Korey Wise — who were wrongly convicted of raping Trisha Meili in Central Park. The series will span from the spring of 1989, when each were first questioned about the incident, to 2014 when they were exonerated and a settlement was reached with the city of New York.



“This is one of the most talked-about cases of our time and Ava’s passionate vision and masterful direction will bring the human stories behind the headlines to life in this series,” said Cindy Holland, vice president of original content for Netflix. “After powerfully reframing the public conversation about criminality and injustice in ‘13th,’ Ava now turns a new lens to a case that exposes deep flaws in our criminal justice system.”

Participant Media’s King added, “It’s an honor to be partnering again with Ava, a uniquely tenacious and inspiring artist. The events of this shocking story continue to resonate today, and the way Ava has chosen to focus intimately on the five young men foregrounds the human costs of this kind of tragedy. We are looking forward to working with Netflix, Tribeca and Harpo on Participant’s first scripted episodic series.”

DuVernay is repped by CAA and attorney Nina Shaw of Del Shaw Moonves Tanaka Finkelstein & Lezcano. Tribeca Productions is also repped by CAA.





**attica locke**  @atticalocke · Nov 27, 2018 

.@EdgarAwards As a member and 2018 Edgar winner, I am begging you to reconsider having Linda Fairstein serve as a Grand Master in next year’s awards ceremony. She is almost singlehandedly responsible for the wrongful incarceration of the Central Park Five. 1/

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**attica locke**  @atticalocke 



For which she has never apologized or recanted her insistence on their guilt for the most heinous of crimes, “guilt” based solely on evidence procured through violence and ill treatment of children in lock up. 2/

12:03 PM · Nov 27, 2018 · [Twitter for iPhone](#)

60 Retweets 402 Likes



**attica locke**  @atticalocke · Nov 27, 2018 

Replying to [@atticalocke](#)

Even after all five (now) men have been exonerated by the state of NY, and other members of the NYC District Attorney’s Office have admitted prosecutorial misconduct on the part of those handling the case in their office 3/

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**attica locke**  @atticalocke · Nov 27, 2018 

ADAs who were led by Linda Fairstein. 4/

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**attica locke**  @atticalocke · Nov 27, 2018 

Just because she has a flourishing publishing career does not mean we should ignore her past—or her continued unwillingness to accept responsibility for ruining five innocent men’s lives. I cannot support this decision. 5/

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**attica locke**  @atticalocke · Nov 27, 2018 

Surely, someone else is more worthy our attention, support, and this laudatory role in the 2019 [@EdgarAwards](#). END [@santanaraymond](#) [@ava](#)

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**attica locke**  @atticalocke · Nov 27, 2018 

Next year’s ceremony will be the same month as the 30th anniversary of the wrongful arrest and subsequent incarceration of five innocent black boys. It is unconscionable that Linda Fairstein be onstage representing our organization. It is unacceptable. [#centralparkfive](#)

 4  93  505 



**attica locke**  @atticalocke · Nov 27, 2018 

I said I was done but I’m not. As an organization navigating its own diversity pitfalls, [@EdgarAwards](#) willingness to overlook Linda Fairstein’s racist actions is very upsetting. I don’t have that luxury.

 7  62  429 



**Jane Sigda** [@jsigly](#) · Nov 27, 2018 

Replying to [@atticalocke](#)

And doubled down in her books-- attacking the "Mayor" for being soft on crime and settling with "criminals." I loathe that she was held up as role model for women lawyers.

   2 



**John Q Public** [@freeintheforest](#) · Nov 27, 2018 

Replying to [@atticalocke](#)

Of course not. Prosecutors are "never" wrong.

More replies



**Terrence Smith** [@MrSmithIII](#) · Jun 4 

Replying to [@atticalocke](#)

That's right. No sympathy, no accountability. She's a monster. She's the savage one. Not the 5 kids.

   2 



## ***After Furor, Literary Group Withdraws Honor for ‘Central Park Five’ Prosecutor***

By Sean Piccoli and Michael Gold

Nov. 28, 2018

*[What you need to know to start the day: Get New York Today in your inbox.]*

Just two days after it came under fire for announcing an award for a novelist and former New York City prosecutor who oversaw the prosecution of the Central Park Five — teenage boys wrongly convicted of rape in 1989 — the organization behind the award withdrew it.

Mystery Writers of America, which promotes mystery and detective fiction and presents the annual Edgar Awards, said Thursday that it would no longer honor Linda Fairstein, a best-selling crime author, with one of its “Grand Master” awards for literary achievement.

The New York-based organization said in a statement that its board “was unaware” of Ms. Fairstein’s role in the infamous Central Park Five case until members raised concerns.

“After profound reflection, the Board has decided that M.W.A. cannot move forward with an award that lacks the support of such a large percentage of our members,” the group said.

The furor began on Tuesday when Mystery Writers of America announced that Ms. Fairstein would be one of two writers honored as Grand Masters at the organization’s awards banquet next spring in New York. Ms. Fairstein is the author of 20 novels about a fictional Manhattan prosecutor, Alexandra Cooper, modeled on her own real-life past work as the chief of the sex-crimes unit of the Manhattan district attorney’s office.

In June, the city released thousands of pages of internal law enforcement documents from the original Central Park Five investigation — some never previously made public — that reinforced the decision in 2002, based on DNA evidence, to overturn the convictions for all five defendants, who had confessed to the crime. In July, Ms. Fairstein wrote an op-ed in the New York Law Journal defending the prosecution. “The confessions were not coerced,” she wrote.

Another writer and Edgar Award winner, Attica Locke, in a series of tweets on Tuesday, urged the organization to honor someone else. “She is almost single-handedly responsible for the wrongful incarceration of the Central Park Five,” wrote Ms. Locke, who also worked on filmmaker Ava DuVernay’s upcoming Netflix docudrama on the case.

Ms. Locke wrote that Ms. Fairstein “never apologized or recanted her insistence” on the boys’ guilt despite their subsequent exonerations. “Just because she has a flourishing publishing career does not mean we should ignore her past — or her continued unwillingness to accept responsibility for ruining five innocent men’s lives,” she wrote. “I cannot support this decision.”

Ms. Fairstein fired back at Ms. Locke on Twitter, defending her office’s handling of the prosecution while also minimizing her own role in it. “I was neither the prosecutor nor investigator in the case you mention,” Ms. Fairstein wrote. “I was certainly NOT the person who ‘single-handedly spearheaded’ the investigation,” Ms. Fairstein wrote.

“Why don’t you and I have a civilized conversation, so I can refresh you with the facts?” She wrote. “Thank you.”

On Thursday, after Mystery Writers of America made its announcement, she thanked the organization for listening to her concerns.



Ms. Fairstein was chief of the sex-crimes unit of the Manhattan district attorney's office. New York Daily News, via Getty Images

Ms. Fairstein, in a statement posted to Facebook on Thursday, she said she was “extremely disappointed” with the group’s decision and remained “enormously proud” of her work with the sex-crimes unit.

“I thank M.W.A. for the initial honor and for the joy it inspired, which can never be revoked, and I am happy to enthusiastically support the new Grand Master,” she wrote.

Ms. Fairstein could not be reached for comment on Wednesday, and a representative responded to a request for an interview on Thursday to the Facebook post.

Officials with the Mystery Writers of America did not immediately respond to calls and emails on Wednesday. “We are taking seriously the issues raised by Attica Locke,” read a statement posted to the organization’s website that has since been removed. “Our board is going to discuss these concerns as soon as possible and make a further statement soon.”

On Facebook, novelist Andrew Gross defended Ms. Fairstein on Wednesday as a worthy Edgar Award recipient: “For a person who has devoted her career to real-world situations that have advanced women’s rights to be attacked and demonized by people whose toughest real-world decisions are how to define a gerund or what book to review is a sign that the inmates are truly running the asylum.”

In an interview on Wednesday, Kellye Garrett, a novelist, said Mystery Writers of America should rescind the award if Ms. Fairstein did not volunteer to give it up. Ms. Garrett praised the organization but said its leaders should explain how they came to choose Ms. Fairstein in the first place. “It’s not a secret, her connection to the Central Park Five,” she said.

“They have work to do,” Ms. Garrett said, “especially when it comes to inclusivity and embracing writers from marginalized communities.”

At an anxious moment in the city's history, with violent crime near its peak, police in 1989 arrested five boys, all black and Hispanic and ages 14 to 16, for the rape and near-fatal beating of Trisha Meili, a 28-year-old white woman who was attacked as she jogged through Central Park after work.

All five youths said their confessions were coerced. But all were convicted in 1990. Four of the teenagers spent about seven years in prison. The other was incarcerated for 13 years. Twelve years after the convictions, DNA evidence pointed to a serial rapist, Matias Reyes, who confessed to the attack while serving a life sentence for other crimes. The Manhattan district attorney agreed to vacate the Central Park Five convictions in 2002. The five — Antron McCray, Kevin Richardson, Yusef Salaam, Raymond Santana Jr. and Kharey Wise — later received a settlement from the city totaling nearly \$45 million.



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**When They See Us | Netflix Official Site**

Five teens from Harlem become trapped in a nightmare when they're falsely accused of a brutal attack in Central Park. Based on the true ...

[netflix.com](https://netflix.com)

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**attica locke** ✓ @atticalocke · Nov 27, 2018

Ava's CP5 project hasn't aired yet. But the Ken Burns documentary, also on [@netflix](https://netflix.com) is amazing and informative.

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49



**Kim Fay** @kimkfay · Nov 27, 2018

Oops! I confused the two. Yes, that's the doc I'm thinking of. I learned much from it. Thanks for the correction!

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12



## ***After Furor, Literary Group Withdraws Honor for ‘Central Park Five’ Prosecutor***

By **Sean Piccoli** and **Michael Gold**

Nov. 28, 2018

*[What you need to know to start the day: Get New York Today in your inbox.]*

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Ms. Fairstein was chief of the sex-crimes unit of the Manhattan district attorney's office. New York Daily News, via Getty Images

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**Linda Fairstein**  @LindaFairstein · 15h 

.@atticalocke Talk to me about the other 6 men viciously attacked in the Park that night, which these and others admit doing. You don't care about them? Good night.

6



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**attica locke** @atticalocke 

Replying to @LindaFairstein

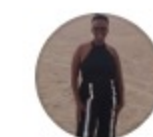
Actually, I think the "good night" here is the sun setting on all the years you've gotten away with not being held to account for your actions in the court of public opinion. So to that... good night indeed.

11/27/18, 3:40 PM

**atticalocke**  • Follow 

**atticalocke**  When I called out the Mystery Writers of America, of which I'm a member, for giving Linda Fairstein, whose office prosecuted the Central Park Five, an award, and she tried to defend herself, couldn't, and started to duck and weave (with more lies)... (She's reinvented herself as a crime writer and most people never connected her to THAT Linda Fairstein.) No more. #goodnightindeed

46w



**plants.pens.and.prose** She tried it, didn't she? But the clapback was real. 🍷



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NOVEMBER 28, 2018

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**MWA is the premier organization for mystery and crime writers, professionals allied to the crime-writing field, aspiring crime writers, and folks who just love to read crime fiction.**

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#### MWA QUICK LINKS

# Mystery Writers of America Withdraws Fairstein Award

BY **MWA** · NOVEMBER 29, 2018

November 29, 2018 – New York, NY – On Tuesday, November 27, Mystery Writers of America announced the recipients of Grand Master, Raven & Ellery Queen Awards, special awards given out annually. Shortly afterwards, the MWA membership began to express concern over the inclusion of Linda Fairstein as a Grand Master, citing controversy in which she has been involved.

When the MWA Board made its selection, it was unaware of Ms. Fairstein's role in the controversy.

After profound reflection, the Board

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## 2020 EDGAR AWARDS SPECIAL EDITION

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has decided that MWA cannot move forward with an award that lacks the support of such a large percentage of our members. Therefore, the Board of Directors has decided to withdraw the Linda Fairstein Grand Master award. We realize that this action will be unsatisfactory to many. We apologize for any pain and disappointment this situation has caused.

MWA will be reevaluating and significantly revising its procedures for selecting honorary awards in the future. We hope our members will all work with us to move forward from this extremely troubling event and continue to build a strong and inclusive organization.



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# The Washington Post

*Democracy Dies in Darkness*

## Mystery writers group rescinds award from sex crimes prosecutor over her role in Central Park Five rape case

By **Meagan Flynn**

November 30, 2018 at 6:44 a.m. EST

For more than 60 years, Mystery Writers of America has bestowed honors on luminaries such as Stephen King and Alfred Hitchcock. For about 48 hours this week, longtime sex-crimes prosecutor Linda Fairstein joined their ranks.

On Tuesday, Fairstein, the former chief of the sex-crimes unit at the Manhattan District Attorney's Office, was awarded the association's Grand Master Award, its highest honor. "How is THIS news for a thrilling surprise," she wrote on Twitter. "I am Mystery Writers of America 2019 GRANDMASTER.....I'm pinching myself."

She wasn't the only one surprised. In a matter of hours, fellow novelists were calling on the association to take the award back.

AD

The problem wasn't her writing. It was Fairstein's role as a prosecutor in the Central Park Five jogger rape case, one of the most infamous wrongful conviction cases in New York history.

By Thursday afternoon, Fairstein was no longer a 2019 Grand Master. Responding to the fury from its members, Mystery Writers of America rescinded her award.

"After profound reflection," the association said in a statement Thursday, "the Board has decided that MWA cannot move forward with an award that lacks support of such a large percentage of our members. Therefore, the Board of Directors has decided to withdraw the Linda Fairstein Grand Master award. We realize that this action will be unsatisfactory to many. We apologize for any pain and disappointment this situation has caused."

AD

Fairstein, who has written 20 novels about a sex crimes prosecutor named Alexandra Cooper, said in a statement Thursday that she was "extremely disappointed, of course, to have this great award-designation revoked so hastily."

"I thank MWA for the initial honor and for the joy it inspired, which can never be revoked, and I am happy to enthusiastically support the new Grand Master," she said.

The case of the Central Park Five, referring to the five teenage African American and Hispanic boys who were wrongfully convicted of raping a jogger, was one of the most sensationalized crimes of the 1980s, inflaming racial tensions and adding fodder to rhetoric that warned of teenage "super-predators" tearing apart communities. At the time, Donald Trump took out full-page ads in the nation's largest newspapers demanding to "BRING BACK THE DEATH PENALTY," warning of "bands of wild criminals roam[ing] our neighborhoods," and wishing they be "forced to suffer." He insisted as recently as 2016 that the five men were still guilty despite their later exonerations.

AD

Fairstein was not the lead prosecutor on the case, but as sex crimes unit chief, she was the supervisor.



She was present while the suspects were interrogated for hours, describing her role in a 2002 interview with the New Yorker as being “the 800-pound gorilla, to help [the lead prosecutor] and the cops get the resources they needed.” Four of the five boys ultimately falsely confessed on video under pressure. In 2002, however, a serial rapist, Matias Reyes, came forward and said he was the real attacker — a confession bolstered by the fact that his DNA matched the semen found on the victim. The five teenagers were later exonerated.

But as recently as Tuesday, Fairstein has continued to suggest that the Central Park Five are guilty of something — if not the rape, then assault. Fairstein has held steadfast to the belief that “these five men were participants, not only in the other attacks that night but in the attack on the jogger,” as she summarized it to the New Yorker in 2002. Fairstein contended the boys simply “moved on” before Reyes finished the assault, leaving his DNA behind — despite the fact that Reyes has insisted he acted alone.

AD

As recently as July 2018, after thousands of pages of documents from the case were released, Fairstein penned an essay for the New York Law Journal defending the investigation and prosecution, insisting the confessions were not coerced.

On Tuesday, mystery novelists began speaking out loudly against Fairstein's award, some of whom said they had never heard of Fairstein's involvement or comments about the Central Park jogger case until this week. But Attica Locke, author of "Bluebird, Bluebird," was very familiar with her role in the case.

"As a member and 2018 Edgar winner, I am begging you to reconsider having Linda Fairstein serve as a Grand Master in next year's awards ceremony," Locke, who has writing credits on an upcoming Netflix docuseries about the Central Park rape case, wrote in a tweet addressed to Mystery Writers of America. "She is almost single-handedly responsible for the wrongful incarceration of the Central Park Five. For which she never apologized or recanted her insistence on their guilt for the most heinous of crimes."

AD



**attica locke**  
@atticalocke

.@EdgarAwards As a member and 2018 Edgar winner, I am begging you to reconsider having Linda Fairstein serve as a Grand Master in next year's awards ceremony. She is almost singlehandedly responsible for the wrongful incarceration of the Central Park Five. 1/

1,223 1:02 PM - Nov 27, 2018

585 people are talking about this

Writing in the Los Angeles Times on Tuesday, mystery novelist Steph Cha said Fairstein's "presence among us should be the scandal of every conference — it probably would've been earlier if there had been more crime writers of color when the Five were exonerated in 2002."

Mystery Writers of America said it was never aware of the Central Park rape controversy, but by Tuesday, the group announced it was "taking seriously the issues raised" by Locke, who was first to urge the group to withdraw the award.

Responding to Locke on Twitter, Fairstein quibbled with Locke's suggestion that she was the lead prosecutor who "single-handedly" wrongfully incarcerated the five boys. "Why don't you and I have a civilized conversation so I can refresh you with the facts?" she said.

AD

In another series of tweets, she again accused the five men of assault. "Talk to me about the other 6 men viciously attacked in the Park that night, which these and others admit doing. You don't care about them? Good night."

.@atticalocke Talk to me about the other 6 men viciously attacked in the Park that night, which these and others admit doing. You don't care about them? Good night.

— Linda Fairstein (@LindaFairstein) November 27, 2018

Their convictions for all other crimes, such as muggings or beatings, were also vacated.

MWA's Grand Master Award will remain with Martin Cruz Smith, who was presented the award alongside Fairstein.

"MWA will be reevaluating and significantly revising its procedures for selecting honorary awards in the future," MWA said in its statement. "We hope our members will all work with us to move forward from this extremely troubling event and continue to build a strong and inclusive organization."

AD



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# A Literary Group Rescinds Award For Linda Fairstein, Amid Outcry Over Her Role In Central Park Five Case

By [MADDY FOLEY](#) | November 29, 2018 |



Paul Hawthorne/Getty Images Entertainment/Getty Images

When the winners of the [Mystery Writers of America's \(MWA\) 2019 Grand Master award](#) were announced on Nov. 27, writer Attica Locke recognized a familiar name: Linda Fairstein. Locke, whose novel [Bluebird, Bluebird](#) won the 2018 Edgar Award for Best Mystery Novel from the MWA, is also a writer for Ava DuVernay's upcoming Netflix miniseries, *Central Park 5*. [Linda Fairstein](#), now a prolific mystery novelist, was the head of Manhattan's Sex Crimes Unit in the 1980s and '90s, and oversaw the prosecution of the Central Park Five, five teenagers wrongly imprisoned for the brutal beating and rape of 28-year-old Trisha Meili. Meili was white; all five boys, between the ages of 14 and 16, were either Black or Latino.

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So Locke took to Twitter. Over the next day, support for Locke, and for her call for the MWA to rescind their award from Fairstein, began building on Twitter. Authors, including [Lori Rader-Day](#), [Jordan Harper](#) and [Marie Myung-Ok Lee](#), re-tweeted Locke. Novelist [Steph Cha](#) penned an article for the [Los Angeles Times](#) about the growing controversy, writing, "Let's remember that the loss of a reward is not comparable to the loss of freedom."

In 48 hours, Locke's initial tweet gained nearly 500 retweets and close to 1,000 likes.

Meanwhile, Fairstein took to her own Twitter, responding directly to Locke.

On Nov. 28, the MWA released a statement that they were "taking seriously the issues raised by Attica Locke." On Nov. 29, that post was taken down and replaced with the announcement that the MWA has officially withdrawn Fairstein's award.

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"When the MWA Board made its selection, it was unaware of Ms. Fairstein's role in the controversy," reads the statement. "After profound reflection, the Board has decided that MWA cannot move forward with an award that lacks the support of such a large percentage of our members."

Since 2002, Fairstein has published 20 novels starring Alexandra Cooper, a sex-crimes prosecutor in New York City. Her protagonist, often presented as Fairstein's own "alter-ego,"

has been held up as an example of a strong, three-dimensional female character by readers.

But since her first appearance on the literary scene, with her 1993 memoir, *Sexual Violence: Our War Against Rape*, Fairstein's initial, decades-long career as head of New York City's Sex Crimes Unit has often been described only in broad strokes.

In the announcement of her appointment as a 2019 Grand Master, [the Mystery Writers of America](#) wrote, "In her 30-year tenure at the Manhattan DA's Office, she was a pioneer in the war against rape, fighting for historic changes to the criminal justice system and for justice on behalf of victims of the most heinous crimes." In the [Publisher's Weekly](#) review of Fairstein's first novel, *Final Jeopardy*, she is described as "the crusading longtime chief of Manhattan's Sex Crimes Prosecutions Unit." And in a review of *Into the Lion's Den*, her first book for middle grade readers, [The National Book Review](#) wrote that Fairstein is "widely regarded as the nation's leading legal expert on sexual assault and domestic violence."

Fairstein's first Alex Cooper novel hit shelves the same year the Central Park Five were exonerated. In the following years, as Fairstein's Alex Cooper novels repeatedly made the *New York Times*' best-seller list, the Central Park Five — Antron McCray, Yusef Salaam, Korey Wise, Raymond Santana and Kevin Richardson — worked to rebuild their lives after growing up, essentially, in prison.

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Bustle reached out to Linda Fairstein for comment, but did not receive a response as of publication. In an email to Bustle, Attica Locke wrote: "Thank you for the interest, but I've

said everything I want to on the subject, and the MWA has rescinded her award. A positive outcome."

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## BOOKS

# Mystery Writers rescind honor for Linda Fairstein, prosecutor on 'Central Park Five' case

**Jennifer Peltz and Hillel Italie** The Associated Press

Published 9:29 p.m. ET Nov. 29, 2018

NEW YORK – The Mystery Writers of America withdrew a major honor Thursday from author Linda Fairstein after other authors condemned the ex-prosecutor's role in New York's notorious "Central Park Five" case.

The decision, just two days after the Grand Master Award was announced, marked the first time the group has ever rescinded the prize, which recognizes lifetime achievement and has been given to Sue Grafton and Stephen King, among others.

"MWA cannot move forward with an award that lacks the support of such a large percentage of our members," the group said in a statement that also pledged to re-evaluate its process for selecting honorees. "We realize that this action will be unsatisfactory to many. We apologize for any pain and disappointment this situation has caused."

Fairstein, known for her best-selling novels featuring prosecutor Alex Cooper, wrote on her Facebook page that she was "extremely disappointed, of course, to have this great award-designation revoked so hastily."

"I remain enormously proud of our pioneering work at the Manhattan District Attorney's Office Sex Crimes Prosecution Unit, advancing the ability of victims of violence to triumph in the criminal justice system," she added. "I thank MWA for the initial honor and for the joy it inspired, which can never be revoked."

When the award was announced Tuesday, Fairstein called it "a thrilling surprise."

"I'm pinching myself," she tweeted at the time.



But some prominent mystery writers, including Attica Locke and Nick Kolakowski, expressed outrage over the decision. On Thursday, Locke tweeted "Thank you @EdgarAwards for listening."

Fairstein was the top Manhattan sex crimes prosecutor when five teenagers were charged with the 1989 rape and beating of a female investment banker jogging in Central Park.

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The attack became a national symbol of urban mayhem at a time when New York City's murder rate was nearing its historical peak. The case also bared the city's racial and class divide, painting a portrait of a crew of black and Hispanic youths "wilding" and preying on a white professional. Donald Trump, a New York real estate developer at the time, bought full-page newspaper ads reading "Bring Back The Death Penalty. Bring Back Our Police!"

The teens said they were coerced into confessing their involvement in the attack. Their convictions were overturned in 2002 after convicted murderer and serial rapist Matias Reyes confessed to committing the crime alone, and DNA linked him to it.

Prosecutors stopped short of declaring the five innocent but withdrew all charges. The legal time clock had run out for charging Reyes, who was already serving life in prison on other convictions. Fairstein observed the boys' 1989 interrogation, conducted by another prosecutor and police. She didn't personally try the case.

Since its collapse, she has denied the teens were coerced and has defended authorities' conduct in the case, explored in a 2013 documentary by Ken Burns.

The city reached a roughly \$41 million settlement with the five the next year, while not admitting any wrongdoing.

In announcing Fairstein's honor had been rescinded, the mystery association said Thursday that its board was "unaware of Ms. Fairstein's role in the controversy."

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Locke and Fairstein exchanged caustic tweets after the award was announced. Locke, who is working with Ava DuVernay on a Netflix docudrama about the case, called Fairstein "almost singlehandedly responsible for the wrongful incarceration of the Central Park Five" and castigated her for not apologizing.

Fairstein responded by tweeting Locke should "learn your facts," adding: "Your anger and comments are so misdirected."

Fairstein built a reputation as a pioneering prosecutor of sexual offenses during her 25 years of leading the Manhattan district attorney's sex crimes unit. She retired in 2002, but already was established as a crime novelist, having agreed in 1995 to a two-book, \$500,000 deal. Her first novel, "Final Jeopardy," came out in 1996 and was the basis for an Edgar-nominated TV miniseries starring Dana Delany. Her other books include "Killer Look," "Devil's Bridge" and "Lethal Legacy."

# Writers' group won't honor prosecutor tied to Central Park 5

By JENNIFER PELTZ and HILLEL ITALIEN November 29, 2018

NEW YORK (AP) — The Mystery Writers of America withdrew a major honor Thursday from author Linda Fairstein after other authors condemned the prosecutor's role in New York's notorious "Central Park Five" case.

The decision, just two days after the Grand Master Award was announced, marked the first time the group has ever rescinded the prize, which recognizes lifetime achievement and has been given to Sue Grafton and Stephen King among others.

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"I'm pinching myself," she tweeted at the time.

But some prominent mystery writers, including Attica Locke and Nick Kolakowski, expressed outrage over the decision. On Thursday, Locke tweeted "Thank you @EdgarAwards for listening."

Fairstein was the top Manhattan sex crimes prosecutor when five teenagers were charged with the 1989 rape and beating of a female investment banker jogging in Central Park.

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The city reached a roughly \$41 million settlement with the five the next year, while not admitting any wrongdoing.

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# After Outcry, MWA Withdraws Fairstein's Grand Master Honor

By John Maher | Nov 29, 2018

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Just two days after Mystery Writers of America announced that it would honor author Linda Fairstein as one of two of its Grand Masters for 2019, the organization withdrew the award following a public outcry over the bestselling crime novelist's role overseeing the prosecution of the Central Park Five when she was the head of the sex crimes unit of the Manhattan district attorney's office. The convictions were ultimately overturned.

Among critics of the decision to give Fairstein the award, established to "acknowledge important contributions" to the mystery genre as well as "a body of work that is both significant and of consistent high quality," were MWA members and honorees, including the writer Attica Locke. In a statement explaining the withdrawal, the MWA's board of directors said it "cannot move forward with an award that lacks the support of such a large percentage of our members."

*Article continues below.*

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**attica locke**  
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.@EdgarAwards As a member and 2018 Edgar winner, I am begging you to reconsider having Linda Fairstein serve as a Grand Master in next year's awards ceremony. She is almost singlehandedly responsible for the wrongful incarceration of the Central Park Five. 1/

1,223 1:02 PM - Nov 27, 2018

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The board continued: "When the MWA Board made its selection, it was unaware of Ms. Fairstein's role in the controversy." It added: "MWA will be reevaluating and significantly revising its procedures for selecting honorary awards in the future."

Martin Cruz Smith, the other honoree, will still be named Grand Master for 2019. Previous Grand Masters include William Link, Peter Lovesey, Jane Langton, Max Allan Collins, Ellen Hart, Walter Mosley, Lois Duncan, James Ellroy, Robert Crais, Carolyn Hart, Ken Follett, Margaret Maron, Martha Grimes, Sara Paretsky, James Lee Burke, Sue Grafton, Bill Pronzini, Stephen King, Marcia Muller, Dick Francis, Mary Higgins Clark, Lawrence Sanders, P.D. James, Ellery Queen, Daphne du Maurier, Alfred Hitchcock, Graham Greene, and Agatha Christie.

Fairstein, who responded to some of her critics via her Twitter account, has yet to issue her own statement.

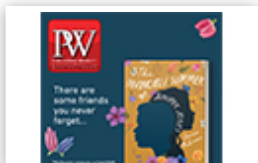
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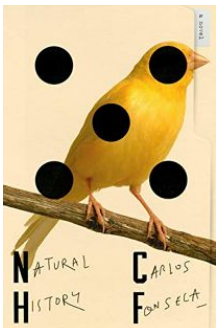
In this way of thinking, folks might also consider reversing the successes of medical procedures on patients by physicians, when later discovering the doctors had done something else viewed as unfair or unacceptable by a body of people, something unrelated to their particular interests and expertise.

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BOOKS

Writer Linda Fairstein’s past as a prosecutor overseeing the Central Park Five case causes award controversy



Author Linda Fairstein, center, signs her ninth crime novel, “Bad Blood,” to Donna Hanover, left, with novelist Mary Higgins Clark, right. Fairstein has been named a Grand Master at the 2019 Edgar Awards. (Diane Bondareff / Montblanc/AP)

By STEPH CHA

NOV. 27, 2018 | 10:30 PM

*On Nov. 29, Mystery Writers of America decided to [withdraw](#) the Linda Fairstein Grand Master award.*

Mystery Writers of America announced the recipients of its 2019 Grand Master Award on Tuesday, but the announcement has been met with more outrage than celebration.

The Grand Master Award, presented at the annual Edgar Awards banquet in New York, is one of the most prestigious distinctions in the mystery genre, an honor held by the likes of Stephen King, Walter Mosley and Agatha Christie. Next year, the award will go to Martin Cruz Smith and Linda Fairstein. I'd heard of Smith, but not Fairstein. And really, I should have known her name. Not for her internationally bestselling Alexandra Cooper series, but because in her former life working for the Manhattan district attorney's office, she [oversaw](#) the prosecution of the Central Park Five. She shouldn't be the toast of a black-tie literary gala — she should be notorious.

As the head of the Sex Crimes Unit, Fairstein was instrumental in the wrongful conviction of five black teenagers accused of raping a white woman jogger in Central Park in 1989. It was a case that made headlines across the country and captivated television audiences, a story fueled by racial tensions and racist rhetoric.

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Fairstein was personally involved in securing the false confessions that formed the prosecution's entire case. Her conduct was so reprehensible that then-appeals court Judge Vito Titone called her out by name in his [dissenting opinion](#) in defendant Yusuf Salaam's unsuccessful appeal, which details her calculated efforts to isolate and induce a confession from the then-15-year-old suspect.



The Five served six to 13 years in prison before their convictions were vacated following the confession of a serial rapist, confirmed by DNA evidence, in 2002. Fairstein has never apologized or changed her position on their guilt. (Nor has [Donald Trump](#), who in 1989 took out full-page newspaper ads in New York City calling for the return of the death penalty after the teens were arrested.) Only four months ago, in a letter to the editor of the New York Law Journal, Fairstein [maintained](#) that “the questioning [of the Central Park Five] was respectful, dignified, carried out according to the letter of the law and with sensitivity to the young age of the men.”

Here’s what Mystery Writers of America had to [say](#) about Fairstein’s legal career, in this cheery news release on Tuesday morning: “Linda Fairstein became a sex-crimes prosecutor during a time when sex crimes were almost impossible to prosecute. In her 30-year tenure at the Manhattan DA’s Office, she was a pioneer in the war against rape, fighting for historic changes to the criminal justice system and for justice on behalf of victims of the most heinous crimes.” It’s not like they didn’t Google her. They just neglected to mention her most famous case, the one that’s become synonymous with prosecutorial overreach and misconduct.

Shortly after the announcement, author Attica Locke — whose “Bluebird, Bluebird” won the 2018 Edgar Award for best novel —took Mystery Writers of America to task on Twitter, begging the group to reconsider its decision to name Fairstein a Grand Master.



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Locke, whose television writing credits include an upcoming Netflix series on the Central Park Five directed by Ava DuVernay, has long been familiar with the case, but didn't realize until recently that Fairstein had reinvented herself as a crime writer, or that so few crime writers seemed to know about her background.

I was one of the clueless until I saw Locke's thread, and I've been entrenched in the mystery world since my first book came out in 2013. I've attended countless book events and conferences — it's very likely I've been in the same room as Fairstein — and have been editing the crime section of the Los Angeles Review of Books since 2015. There are certainly big-name authors I don't run across, but I tend to hear the gossip. I knew about Anne Perry's background (see the movie "Heavenly Creatures") and that former L.A. prosecutor Marcia Clark was publishing mystery novels. I find it disturbing that I never heard a word about Fairstein's history.

Her presence among us should be the scandal of every conference — it probably would've been earlier if there had been more crime writers of color when the Five were exonerated in 2002. But at some point, her background must have become old news, an uncomfortable thing the larger crime world has been happy to ignore. How many of us have been polite to her on accident because the rest of us were polite to her on purpose?

Tacit approval is one thing, of course; the Grand Master Award is another. Mystery Writers of America has made a lot of fuss about diversity over the last few years, and I do believe that the mystery community has made some meaningful strides toward inclusion. But we're apparently still at a place where the board of Mystery Writers of America thinks calling the white prosecutor who oversaw the conviction of innocent black boys "Grand Master" is a good idea. It's also worth noting that the Edgar Awards banquet will take place in April, almost exactly 30 years after the Five were wrongfully arrested and imprisoned.

After Locke's thread spread widely, Mystery Writers of America said via Twitter: "We are taking seriously the issues raised by @atticalocke . Our Board is going to discuss these concerns as soon as possible and make a further statement soon." It seems as though the blowback has taken the board by surprise. On the one hand, the lack of foresight is breathtaking. But on the other, it sure did look as if everyone was cool with Linda Fairstein for a while there.

Mystery Writers of America is now in a tough spot. Many crime writers have already called

for the revocation of Fairstein's award. Meanwhile, Fairstein is sparring with Locke on Twitter, and I doubt she or her supporters would be happy to see the organization cave to the pressure. While the mystery writing community has changed somewhat over the last few years, it has long been embarrassingly white and, if not outright conservative, less than progressive in its collective values (hello hero cops and beautiful dead girls). Fairstein has made a name for herself writing legal thrillers about a sex crimes prosecutor who serves justice and saves the day. She's made enormous profits with these stories, and has been astoundingly successful in shaping her own narrative and retaining the respect of her community.

Whatever Mystery Writers of America decides — and let's remember that the loss of a reward is not comparable to the loss of freedom — this debacle will show our divisions. Fairstein's actions can no longer fly under the radar. We all have to deal with her now.

*Cha is a novelist, editor and attorney. She has been a member of Mystery Writers of America since 2013.*

#### UPDATES:

**Nov. 30 9:50 a.m.:** This essay was with updated with news that Mystery Writers of America withdrew the Grand Master Award for Linda Fairstein.

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## The Seattle Review of Books



### ***Mystery Writers of America withdraws Grand Master award for Linda Fairstein***

John Maher writes at *Publishers Weekly*:

*Just two days after Mystery Writers of America announced that it would honor author Linda Fairstein as one of two of its Grand Masters for 2019, the organization withdrew the award following a public outcry over the bestselling crime novelist's role overseeing the prosecution of the Central Park Five, which ultimately led to wrongful conviction.*

The board released a statement claiming they were “unaware of Ms. Fairstein’s role in the controversy.” (I’d argue that the Central Park Five case was a travesty and not a controversy, but whatever.) This marks the second literary controversy to reach a sensible conclusion in less than a week. I’m sure somewhere, someone is firing up their laptop to write an “actually, internet mobs are still bad” thinkpiece; I look forward to not reading that awful piece. Published a year ago (2018-11-29T19:54:00.000Z) by Paul Constant

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# The Guardian



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## Linda Fairstein: literary group rescinds honor over role in Central Park Five case

**Mystery Writers of America withdrew Grand Master award from ex-prosecutor after writers expressed outrage over the decision**

*Guardian staff and agencies*

Thu 29 Nov 2018 17.02 EST

The Mystery Writers of America (MWA) withdrew a major honor on Thursday from author Linda Fairstein after other writers condemned the ex-prosecutor's role in New York's notorious "Central Park Five" case.

The decision, just two days after the Grand Master award was announced, marked the first time the group has ever rescinded the prize, which recognizes lifetime achievement and has been given to such writers as Sue Grafton and Stephen King.

"MWA cannot move forward with an award that lacks the support of such a large percentage of our members," the group said in a statement that also pledged to re-evaluate its process for selecting honorees.

Fairstein, known for her bestselling Alex Cooper novels, was speaking at a conference on Thursday and referred an inquiry to her publisher, Penguin Publishing Group's Dutton imprint. It had no immediate comment.

When the award was announced on Tuesday, Fairstein called it "a thrilling surprise".

"I'm pinching myself," she tweeted at the time.

But some prominent mystery writers, including Attica Locke and Nick Kolakowski, expressed outrage over the decision. On Thursday, Locke tweeted: "Thank you @EdgarAwards for listening."

Fairstein was the top Manhattan sex crimes prosecutor when five teenagers were charged with the 1989 rape and beating of a female investment banker jogging in Central Park.

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The teens said they were coerced into confessing their involvement in the attack.

The victim, whose identity had been protected, chose to identify herself in 2003 as Trisha Meili. She had no memory of the attack that nearly killed her. She later ran the New York marathon and wrote a book.

The five convictions were overturned in 2002 after convicted murderer and serial rapist Matias Reyes confessed to committing the crime alone, and DNA linked him to it.

Prosecutors stopped short of declaring the five innocent but withdrew all charges. The legal time clock had run out for charging Reyes, who was already serving life in prison on other convictions.

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Fairstein responded by tweeting Locke should "learn your facts", adding: "Your anger and comments are so misdirected."

Long a controversial figure, she also wrote a piece in the New York Law Journal earlier this year defending her conduct and reputation.



Fairstein garnered a reputation as a pioneering prosecutor of sexual offenses during her 25 years of leading the Manhattan district attorney's sex crimes unit. She retired in 2002 and began a successful career as a crime novelist, often drawing upon her past as a prosecutor.

She spoke out to the Washington Post during the confirmation of Brett Kavanaugh to the supreme court, in defense of the account of Christine Blasey Ford, who accused the judge of attempting to rape her when they were teens.

But Fairstein also indirectly helped the disgraced film mogul Harvey Weinstein with his search for legal representation in the past after being accused of sexual assault and cast doubt on one of his accusers in the protest.

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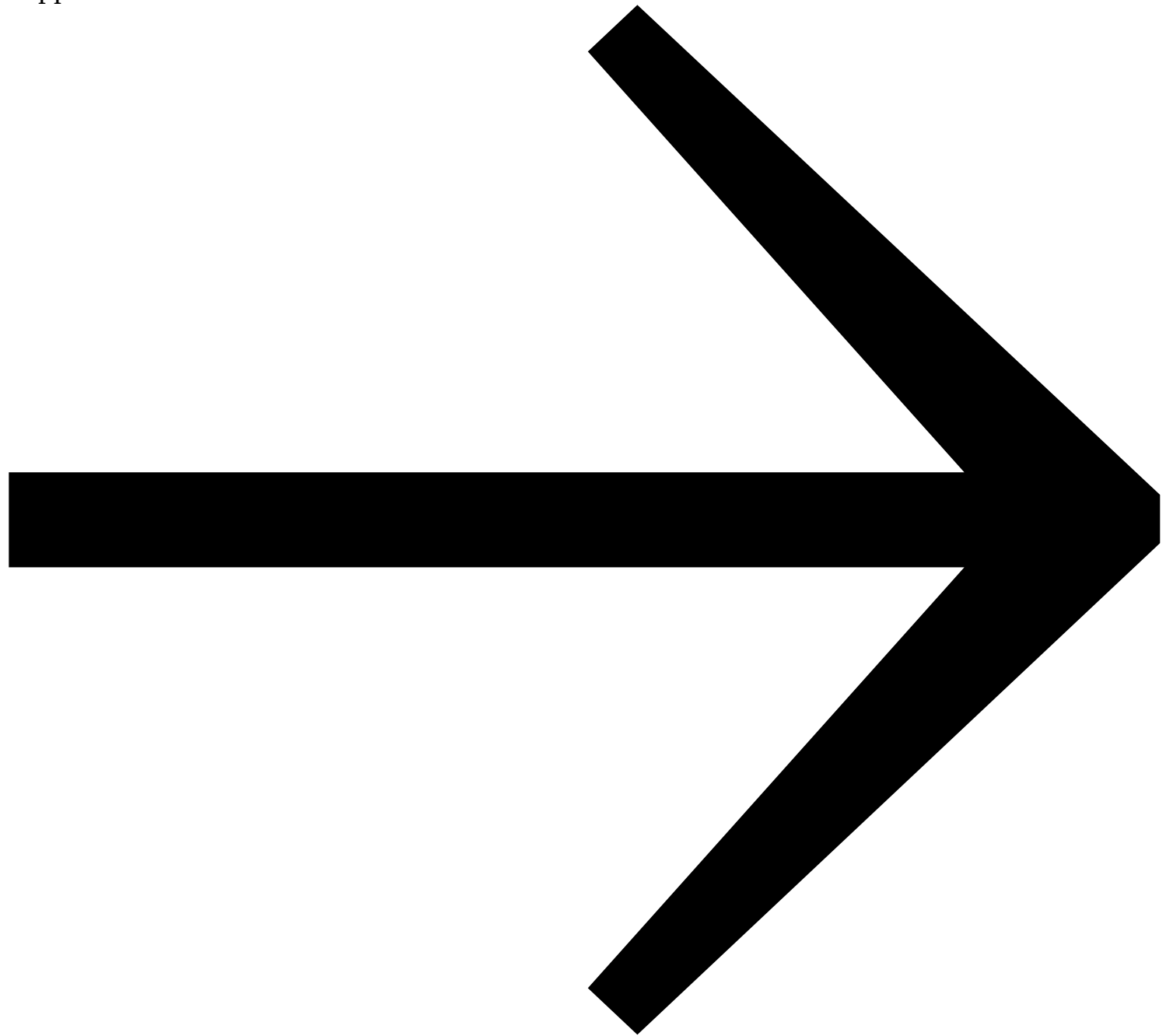
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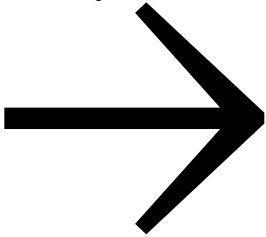
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## Mystery writers group withdraws award to former prosecutor because of controversial case

BY DEBRA CASSENS WEISS ([HTTPS://WWW.ABAJOURNAL.COM/AUTHORS/4/](https://www.abajournal.com/authors/4/))

DECEMBER 3, 2018, 7:50 AM CST

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A novelist's role as a supervisor during the controversial prosecution of the so-called Central Park Five came back to haunt her when a mystery writers group revoked an award it had given her only days before.

Prosecutor-turned-novelist Linda Fairstein received the Grand Master Award from the Mystery Writers of America last Tuesday.

Photo by ShutterOK/Shutterstock.com

(<https://www.shutterstock.com/g/shutterok>).

The honor lasted only two days, at which time the group rescinded

the award, report the Washington Post ([https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2018/11/30/mystery-writers-group-rescinds-award-sex-crimes-prosecutor-over-her-role-central-park-five-rape-case/?utm\\_term=.43510d294ef5&wpisrc=nl\\_mix&wpmm=1](https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2018/11/30/mystery-writers-group-rescinds-award-sex-crimes-prosecutor-over-her-role-central-park-five-rape-case/?utm_term=.43510d294ef5&wpisrc=nl_mix&wpmm=1)), the Guardian

(<https://www.theguardian.com/books/2018/nov/29/linda-fairstein-mystery-writers-of-america-grand-master-award-rescinded>) and the Associated Press (<https://www.usatoday.com/story/life/books/2018/11/29/mystery-writers-rescind-honor-linda-fairstein-prosecutor-central-park-five/2156900002/>).

The group said in a statement that it “cannot move forward with an award that lacks support of such a large percentage of our members.”

Fairstein has written 20 novels featuring a sex crimes prosecutor named Alexandra Cooper.

The outcry among the mystery group’s members concerned Fairstein’s role as a supervisor during the prosecution of five African-American and Hispanic teens in the rape and beating a Central Park jogger in 1989. Fairstein was the chief of the sex crimes unit at the Manhattan district attorney’s office at the time. The case was prosecuted amid fears of a rising murder rate in New York City and a media portrayal of “wilding” youths in the park.

The convictions were overturned in 2002 after a convicted serial rapist confessed to the crime and said he acted alone. DNA backed up his story.

Fairstein didn’t try the case, nor did she investigate it, she said on Twitter (<https://twitter.com/LindaFairstein/status/1067556116735897607>). But she was present during interrogation of the teens. Four of them confessed. In a letter

(<https://www.law.com/newyorklawjournal/2018/07/31/in-defense-of-the-central-park-5-prosecution/?slreturn=20181027235733>) to the New York Law Journal in July, Fairstein said the confessions were not coerced, and the questioning was “respectful, dignified, carried out according to the letter of the law and with sensitivity to the young age of the men.”

She wrote the letter in response to a New York Law Journal article

(<https://www.law.com/newyorklawjournal/2018/07/20/lawyers-for-central-park-five-say-first-release-of-discovery-materials-biases-clients/>) in which lawyers for the wrongly convicted teens complained that the first batch of newly released documents from the case portray their clients in a bad light.

The five men reached a \$40 million settlement with the city in 2014, the New York Times reported at the time (<https://nyti.ms/TcaJlr>). The defendants later denied taking part in the rape, although three men acknowledged during parole hearings that they were



among a group of teens in the park, and some of the group members assaulted other people in the park, according to the Times' reading of the transcripts.

Fairstein maintained on Twitter that the teens were involved in the other attacks. "Talk to me about the other 6 men viciously attacked in the park that night, which these and others admit doing," she tweeted (<https://twitter.com/LindaFairstein/status/1067560789597392897>).

Fairstein's 16th book, *Terminal City*, was one of the three finalists

([https://www.abajournal.com/news/article/2015\\_harper\\_lee\\_prize\\_voting/news/article/does\\_a\\_diverse\\_bench\\_really\\_matter/?icn=sidebar&ici=text](https://www.abajournal.com/news/article/2015_harper_lee_prize_voting/news/article/does_a_diverse_bench_really_matter/?icn=sidebar&ici=text)) for the 2015 Harper Lee Prize for Legal Fiction (

[http://www.abajournal.com/news/article/vote\\_for\\_the\\_best\\_legal\\_novel\\_of\\_the\\_year](http://www.abajournal.com/news/article/vote_for_the_best_legal_novel_of_the_year)), which is partly sponsored by the ABA Journal. She also was on a panel of judges for the Harper Lee contest in 2011 ([https://www.abajournal.com/news/article/john\\_grisham\\_wins\\_first\\_harper\\_lee\\_prize\\_for\\_legal\\_fiction/](https://www.abajournal.com/news/article/john_grisham_wins_first_harper_lee_prize_for_legal_fiction/)) and 2012

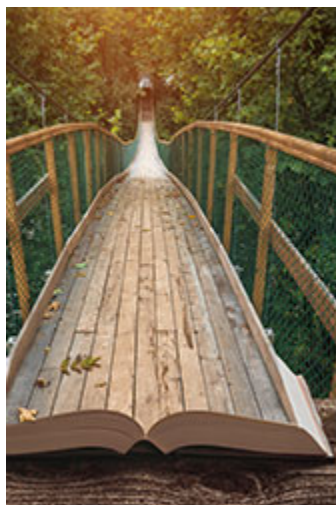
([https://www.abajournal.com/news/article/help\\_pick\\_the\\_legal\\_novel\\_of\\_the\\_year\\_vote\\_for\\_one\\_of\\_three\\_harper\\_lee/](https://www.abajournal.com/news/article/help_pick_the_legal_novel_of_the_year_vote_for_one_of_three_harper_lee/)).

She spoke with the ABA Journal about her writing in an August 2015 podcast

([https://www.abajournal.com/books/article/podcast\\_episode\\_41](https://www.abajournal.com/books/article/podcast_episode_41)).

When the Mystery Writers of America award was announced, Fairstein tweeted that the news was "a thrilling surprise." She released a new statement on Facebook (<https://www.facebook.com/LindaFairstein/posts/10156299100322585>) after the award withdrawal. "I am extremely disappointed, of course, to have this great award-designation revoked so hastily," she wrote. "I thank MWA for the initial honor and for the joy it inspired, which can never be revoked, and I am happy to enthusiastically support the new Grand Master."

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Thread



**attica locke**   
@atticalocke



If you think Linda Fairstein acted “professionally and responsibly and without prejudice or malice” in the Central Park Five case—which, don’t get it twisted, she did lead—then I’m not sure who the real bully is. It’s certainly not a writer who simply asked the MWA to reconsider.

1:11 PM · Dec 18, 2018 · [Twitter for iPhone](#)

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**attica locke** @atticalocke · Dec 18, 2018  
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And, yes, I worked on Ava Duvernay’s project in the case. That’s why I know so much about the case. The research on that project is extensive. And I actually read the trial transcripts. And I chose to share my knowledge of Fairstein’s misdeeds with MWA. Me, one person. Not a mob.

3

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**attica locke** @atticalocke · Dec 18, 2018



And I came into the world “race-tinged.” It is a privilege to hold a world view broader than that of Otto Penzler, Nelson DeMille, and Barbara Peters.

4

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90



**Gale Massey** @galemassey · Dec 18, 2018  
Replying to [@atticalocke](#)



It’s practically a universal law that a bully in a position of power will claim to have been bullied when things don’t go their way.



11



**Michael Niemann** @m\_e\_niemann · Dec 18, 2018  
Replying to [@atticalocke](#)



I’m very glad you did. Thank you. Unbelievable that this should even be a question. The idea that that case was handled “professionally and responsibly and without prejudice or malice” is simply preposterous.



4



**Taylor Loeb** @tLoebLookout · Dec 18, 2018  
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Agree with you on all counts. Have you listened to S2 of [@InTheDarkAPM](#) about the [#CurtisFlowers](#) case?



3



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